

ADVENT – #1

“Waiting + Faith = Hope”

Matthew 12:15-21; Isaiah 42:1-4

THE BIG IDEA

Waiting...who likes to wait? Waiting in lines, waiting for the test results, waiting for a phone call—waiting does not come to us naturally. But Matthew’s gospel has a different perspective. He helps us see that when we wait in faith, our waiting turns to hope that God will continue to bring new things in our life. Advent is the season when we wait for the birth of the Christ Child. The unique thing about this season is that with Christ’s coming and with God’s answer to our waiting, the resolution is usually more subtle than we asked, and asks more of us than we expected.

OPEN WITH PRAYER

GETTING STARTED

1. What is one of the best Christmas presents you ever received?

LEARNING & APPLYING GOD’S WORD

2. Retell, in your own words, the main point of the message on waiting from Sunday’s sermon.

Together, read Matthew 12:15-21 and Isaiah 42:1-4

3. What is something you waited for in your life? What was it like to wait?
4. How does the passage from Matthew 12 describe Jesus’s coming as Messiah? What are his characteristics?
5. Matthew borrows these words from the prophet Isaiah in chapter 42:1-4. What does Jesus fulfill in the prophecy from Isaiah? Are there any expectations he disappoints?
6. The biblical scholar N.T. Wright comments on this passage from Matthew saying, “The nations—and, alas, Israel as well, as becomes clear in Matthew’s story—are bent on violence and arrogance.” “So, too, those who to get ahead in this world tend to push others out of the way. If they see a weak link—a rod that’s bent and could break, a candle that’s almost gone out—they will trample on it without a thought. That’s not the Servant’s way.”

In what way does Matthew say Jesus came? Arrogance and violence, pushing others out the way, or as a servant? Why is this significant? Why does it matter that Jesus came in this way?

LIVING OUT “REAL LIFE”

7. In some mysterious way our faith activates God to act on our behalf as it says in Matthew 9:29, “According to your faith, let it be done to you.”

If this is the case, if our faith somehow causes God to act, then how are you specifically seeking to grow in your faith these days?

THE “EXTRA MILE”

8. Over the next two weeks as you are waiting for the birth of the Christ Child, why not try one of the following ways to grow in your faith (or come up with your own ideas!):
- Read Scripture daily for the next two weeks (go to <http://www.pcusa.org/lectionary/> to get daily scripture readings)
 - Seek to serve someone at work, at home, or when you are around town
 - Commit to an Adult Discipleship Class at W.O.W. starting January 7 (for class information go to <http://www.bidwellpres.org/programs/adult/WOW>)
 - Join a Real Life Group starting January 18 (for more information, go to <http://www.bidwellpres.org/programs/adult/smallgroups>)

SHARING AND PRAYER (Prayer Requests)

ADVENT – #2

“Big Enough, Small Enough”

John 1:1-14; Ephesians 3:14-19

THE BIG IDEA

God is big...REALLY BIG. He created the heavens and the earth, the stars and planets. He holds everything together. He is all powerful, all-knowing, all-wise, everlasting, completely holy and pure, perfect in every way. Nothing can contain God, and no words can describe God. God is BIG!

Yet God is small...really small. He is humble, taking on the form of a child, leaving the bigness of heaven and entering into the smallness of the world. He became like you and me, and in so doing makes himself available to be known intimately.

We need a God who is both BIG and small, don't we? We need a God who is big enough to handle our lives, yet small enough to be personal, knowable, and involved in our lives in ways that matter most.

OPEN WITH PRAYER

GETTING STARTED

1. What is your favorite Christmas carol? Why?

LEARNING & APPLYING GOD'S WORD

2. How can God be both big and small at the same time?

Together, read John 1:1-14. Read it once in the *New International Version* or the *New Revised Standard Version* and then read it again in *The Message* paraphrase. If you don't have these versions, you can find them on www.biblegateway.com.

3. How does John describe the bigness of God in these verses?
4. How does he describe the smallness of God?

Together read Ephesians 3:14-19.

5. How does Paul describe the bigness and smallness of God in these verses?
6. Verse 17 says that Christ lives in our hearts through faith. This is incredible!
How is this possible?

How could the realization that Christ lives in your heart through faith change your circumstances?

LIVING OUT “REAL LIFE”

7. Take a moment to reflect on how you need the “bigness” of God in your life? Perhaps you need God’s power, wisdom, healing, strength, or forgiveness to face circumstances or a relationship. How do you long for God to be BIG?
8. Similarly, take a second to think about how you need God to be small in your life? Maybe you need God to come to you in order to meet a personal need. Or perhaps you’re feeling lonely, tired, scared, or even depressed this Christmas season. How do you long to experience the “smallness” of God?

THE “EXTRA MILE”

9. Christmas can be a very joyful time for some, yet for others it can be very lonely and difficult. God longs to meet us in very BIG, yet SMALL ways at Christmas—**and most often he does this through his people (you and me)**. Take a moment to consider who you can share the message of the “bigness” and “smallness” of God with this Christmas. Do something tangible for this person to share this message (i.e. a phone call, a gift, a visit, invite them for dinner, a note of encouragement, etc.).

SHARING AND PRAYER (Prayer Requests)

“Say Yes to a Life Worth Living” Philippians 3:1-14

THE BIG IDEA

When God created us in his image, He intended us to live big lives—lives full of meaning, purpose, mission, beauty, and direction. As we enter 2009 it has become increasingly difficult to chisel away at all the extraneous “stuff” in order to get at what God first intended. We live in a culture fraught with distractions and opportunities to *not* do what God has called us to. Paul, in his letter to the Philippians, offers to us the “main thing”—the one thing worth far more than any other thing in life. But there is a catch! In order to say, “Yes” to the main thing, it means we have to say, “No” to other secondary values.

OPEN WITH PRAYER

GETTING STARTED

1. If you could have any skill in the world, what would it be? Why would you choose it?

LEARNING & APPLYING GOD’S WORD

2. Explain the main point of Sunday’s message as if you were talking to a junior higher.

Together, read Philippians 3:1-14

3. What motivates you the most in your life?
4. Based on this passage from Philippians, what motivates Paul the most? What did he say “no” to in order grab hold of what he felt was most important?
5. What, according to Paul, is the “heavenly call of God”?

LIVING OUT “REAL LIFE”

6. How would saying yes to God’s call in your life reaffirm or change what you’re doing?

What do you need to say no to in order to follow God’s call? Outright sin?
A distraction? Other seemingly good, yet less important goals?

THE "EXTRA MILE"

7. Greg outlined 3 commitments we can make in order to say yes to God's call in our lives:
 - a. Determine the big "yes" (what is God's call for you)
 - b. Know your "no's" (what do you need to say no to in order to answer God's call)
 - c. Keep your "no's" in front of you (how will you keep disciplined to God's call and to your no's?)

Take some time this week to answer each of these 3 commitments then begin to practice these commitments in the new year.

SHARING AND PRAYER (Prayer Requests)

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

"The glory of God is man fully alive." -Irenaeus